

○ **J. SIMPSON AND G. WIGGLESWORTH
(EDS), *CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE AND
MULTILINGUALISM: INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGE USE AT HOME AND SCHOOL*
(LONDON: CONTINUUM INTERNATIONAL, 2008, PP. 22, 311)**

This book focuses on Indigenous Australian children growing up in highly complex and often rapidly changing linguistic environments. Indigenous children encounter diverse language environments on a daily basis and need to learn negotiate them, from early childhood, when they communicate in their mother tongue, through schooling when they encounter Australian English. The challenges posed by this situation for the children, their families and educators are at the core of this edited volume of 13 chapters, each presenting a case study approach to a particular problem.

The book is divided into four sections: Early development of language and language-related activities at home, Language and learning in the classroom context, Assessment and Language landscapes, language shift and multilingualism.

In the first section, Chapter 1 by Wigglesworth & Simpson shows the complex multilingual input for children from the Kalkaringi, Tennant Creek and Yakanarra communities in the Northern Territory. In none of these communities are people speaking unaltered traditional Indigenous languages to the children. Instead, interlocutors use a broad range of language varieties ranging from mixed languages through to a variety of more or less basilectal Kriol to Standard Australian English.

Chapter 2 by Moses & Yallop examines the complex range and variety of questioning techniques used with children in the Yakanarra community (Western Australia). Earlier studies argued that Aboriginal children were unfamiliar with question and answer routines as a teaching or learning tool because Aboriginal people in general do not ask many questions. Moses and Yallop demonstrate that the children of the Yakanarra community are perfectly accustomed to being asked a variety of questions by adults and question-answer routines as a teaching device are well known to them. These findings point to other reasons – which need to be addressed – for the children's lack of classroom participation in question and answer routines, e.g. being unfamiliar with Australian Standard English which is the language of instruction, or being taught by newly graduated monolingual teachers who have no training in teaching English to speakers of other languages.

The following two chapters take the reader to the theme of storytelling. Disbray in Chapter 3 analyses 13 storytelling sessions by adults to children in Tennant Creek (Northern Territory) and discovers a stylistic difference between the storytelling of caregivers in Tennant Creek and the narration styles of the Standard Australian English classroom. In Chapter 4, Eickelkamp focuses on sand stories which play an important role in the language development of Indigenous children and shows that the traditional practice of sand storytelling is of contemporary significance and at the same time represents a link to the Dreaming.

Section 2 of the volume addresses three issues in the area of language and learning in the classroom. In Chapter 5 Reeders focuses on the question of how Yolngu people give information and explanations to their children. She examines nine interactions (totalling 31 minutes) from successful teaching settings, recorded on Yolngu family excursions to the bush or the beach, and analyses the linguistic strategies which were used in order to give information or explanations. The findings show that these strategies differ from Western strategies and may have consequences for the Yolngu interaction in what Reeders terms 'Australian Dominant Culture' classrooms (p.104).

Moses and Wigglesworth in Chapter 6 take the reader to a small multi-age (5 to 14 years), single teacher, 'English-only' school south-east of Tennant Creek (Northern Territory) and outline the difficulties that may be encountered owing to the lack of cross-cultural understanding by teachers. The study is based on video and audio recordings of whole-class teaching sessions that were collected over a period of three weeks. The analysis focuses on the linguistic and paralinguistic causes of the breakdown in communication as well as on the nature and purpose of questions in the pedagogical process. The study shows that this type of teaching fails because on the one hand the teacher is unable to modify her language to accommodate the needs of children who are second language learners of Standard Australian English and on the other because the teacher is unable to provide an appropriate interactional model which enables the children to develop and extend their linguistic skills.

Chapter 7 focuses on the acquisition of literacy in Ngaanyatjarra culture in the Western Desert. Using an ethnographic approach, Kral and Ellis explore literacy as a social and cultural practice. Their study describes the oral language socialisation of the children, outlines the impact of language shift on the development of linguistic and cognitive skills, traces the intergenerational literacy transmission since the introduction of textual practices, in Ngaanyatjarra and English, from the 1930s onwards and shows that literacy practices have been adopted by the community. They argue that, in order to witness their elders in literate roles, Aboriginal children need to be observing and parti-

icipating in activities where literacy has meaning for those elders. Otherwise, it is unlikely that literacy will be acquired as social practice by the next generation which may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of schooling in the future.

In the first chapter concerned with assessment, Chapter 8, Jones and Nangari discuss strategies for assessing children's oral skills in Indigenous languages. Selected strategies are presented, the rationale for these is explained and their use in language revival or revitalisation contexts in general as well as in Australian Aboriginal language contexts in particular is discussed.

The assessment of children with potential speech disorders is the focus of Chapter 9. Gould outlines the problems associated with assessing the language abilities of minority and Indigenous children and describes why natural language sampling combined with appropriately designed, administered and interpreted activity-based assessments minimises the risk of inaccurately labelling communication differences as communication deficits.

In the last chapter of this section, Galloway looks at the problem of ear infection (otitis media) that is widespread among Indigenous children. She briefly describes the clinical picture of otitis media and explains its possible impact on the development of language and literacy skills. On the basis of a longitudinal study undertaken in 16 schools in Western Australia, with 80 teachers and Aboriginal teaching assistants and over 500 Aboriginal students (aged 5–8 years) involved, Galloway explains how systematic and explicit teaching can meet the needs of students with speech and language impairment caused by otitis media.

The fourth section – Language landscapes, language shift and multilingualism – in Chapter 11, McConvell deals with language mixing and language shift in Indigenous Australia. Three different types of language shift are described and a hypothesis is constructed suggesting a causal link with different language uses in a multilingual language ecology.

Chapter 12 focuses on children's language acquisition in the remote community Lajamanu (Northern Territory). In this community, the children acquire Light Warlpiri, a newly mixed language, and their heritage language Warlpiri. The two languages have shared elements, and there is a lot of code-switching between them. By recording adults and children (7 and 9 years old) telling stories from picture books, O'Shannessy examines whether the children – once they produce both languages – speak each language in the same way that adults do. By analysing the patterns of verb-auxiliary use as well as the use of ergative markers, O'Shannessy shows that even in an environment where several languages are spoken and people code-switch between them, the children are able to

identify which elements belong to which language, which elements can be mixed in certain circumstances, and which may not.

Meakins, in Chapter 13, completes the volume with a focus on the community of Kalkaringi (Northern Territory) where a complex mix of six languages is in use: two traditional languages Gurindji and Warlpiri, Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English as well as Kriol and Gurindji Kriol. On the basis of recording transcripts, Meakins gives a general idea of the social domain and grammar of each of the languages, classifies three types of code-switching which are used by the speakers of this community, and summarises the main factors which have caused the language mix in this area.

This book makes valuable contributions to the field of children's language and multilingualism in Indigenous communities. It offers comprehensive and detailed insights into a variety of topics. For researchers, it provides a broad overview of issues in Australia in particular, summarises the latest key findings and inspires to further research within these fields. For educators and government bodies it offers a pool of valuable information on the complex language environment of Indigenous communities, giving them the opportunity to understand and respond more effectively to the challenges these communities and their teaching staff face. Finally, this volume is a valuable resource for Indigenous people who are interested in the current Indigenous language situation and who wish to make a contribution to future language planning for Australian Indigenous communities or for Indigenous communities across the world.

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